

**JOINT STAFF REPORT
WHITE STURGEON FACT SHEET
Joint State Sport Hearing
September 23, 2003**

PURPOSE: To review the lower Columbia River sport sturgeon fishery and consider modifications to currently adopted fishing regulations.

MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

- During 2003-2005, sturgeon fisheries between the Columbia River mouth and Bonneville Dam are guided by a Joint State Sturgeon Fishery Management Agreement adopted by the Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions and the Columbia River Compact, as has been the case since 1997. The major tenets of the Joint State Agreement include:
 - ✓ Sturgeon fisheries are managed on an optimum sustained yield approach which, absent a significant update, results in an annual harvestable number of 40,000 white sturgeon for 2003-2005.
 - ✓ The harvestable number is to be allocated 80% (32,000 fish) sport and 20% (8,000 fish) commercial.
 - ✓ Sport fishery regulations include; size limits of 42"-60" for white and green sturgeon, one sturgeon per day and ten sturgeon per year catch limits, and barbless hooks required.
- In conjunction with the re-adoption of all major tenets of the Joint State Sturgeon Fishery Management Agreement, the Oregon and Washington Fish and Wildlife Commissions also directed staff to develop sport fishing regulations that are consistent with the following objectives:
 - ✓ Minimize emergency inseason action.
 - ✓ Balance catch between estuary and non-estuary fisheries and maintain a diverse array of sturgeon fishing opportunity.
 - ✓ Maintain fishery monitoring and management capabilities.
- The states also developed a Joint State fishery plan for management of the lower Columbia River sport fishery in 2003. The Joint State fishery plan is consistent with aforementioned sport fishery management objectives with established area specific catch quotas and expected seasons as follows:
 - ✓ Quota management of lower Columbia River sport fisheries in the estuary (downstream of the Wauna power lines) and gorge (upstream of the Wauna power lines) areas split 60% (18,000 fish) and 40% (12,000 fish) of a total allowed catch of 30,000 white sturgeon, respectively. Managing for a catch of 30,000 white sturgeon provides a 2,000 fish buffer for fishery management needs.
 - ✓ The proposed season structure for the estuary area provided retention seasons during January 1 through July 9 and October 1 through December 31.
 - ✓ The proposed season structure for the gorge area provided retention seasons during January 1 through March 23 and July 1 through December 31. Catch evaluation will occur to determine shaping of the fishery during the July 1 through December 31 time frame.

FISHERY UPDATE

- At a Joint State meeting on February 13, 2003 seasons were adopted that prohibited retention of sturgeon in sport fisheries downstream of the Wauna power lines, including Youngs Bay, during July 10 through September 30 and upstream of the Wauna power lines, including the Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls, during March 24 through June 30.
- Based on inseason catch projections sturgeon retention in the estuary area was prohibited on June 28, which was 12 days earlier than scheduled. Catches to date have totaled 18,400 white sturgeon as compared to the catch guideline of 18,000 white sturgeon.
- Currently adopted regulations allow sturgeon retention in the estuary area during October 1 through December 31.

<i>Sturgeon Catch and Effort Through August in the Lower Columbia River Sport Fishery, 1994-2003</i>				
<u>Year</u>	<u>Angler Trips</u>	<u>Legals Kept</u>	<u>CPUE Kept/Trip</u>	<u>Regulation Enacted</u>
2003	119,000	25,200	0.212	One fish bag all year, retention prohibited June 28-September 30 downstream of the Wauna power lines and March 24-June 30 upstream of the Wauna power lines.
2002	139,600	36,200	0.259	One fish bag all year, retention prohibited Sunday and Monday during March 3-May 13 and all days during July 25-September 30, and October 1-November 22.
2001	149,000	33,900	0.228	One fish bag all year, retention prohibited entire river during August and September.
2000	161,300	32,300	0.200	One fish bag all year, retention prohibited in estuary during April.
1999	156,900	33,200	0.212	One fish bag all year.
1998	173,000	35,700	0.206	One fish bag all year.
1997	168,200	33,600	0.200	One fish bag all year.
1996	154,100	37,200	0.241	Two fish bag (1 & 1 rule) prior to 4/1/96 and one fish bag thereafter.
1995	188,300	45,100	0.240	Two fish bag (1 & 1 rule) all year, retention prohibited during September 1-December 31 downstream of Bonneville Dam.
1994	135,300	23,700	0.175	Two fish bag (1 & 1 rule) all year.

- Catches in the gorge area through August have totaled 6,800 white sturgeon. Based on catch and effort data through mid-September, catch during September is projected to total 2,650 white sturgeon, which would bring the total through September to 9,450 white sturgeon.
- Catches in the gorge area during October-December are strongly affected by weather patterns with cold, wet weather reducing catch and warm, dry weather increasing catch.

<i>White Sturgeon Catch in the Gorge Area (Upstream of Wauna Power Lines) During 2003</i>				
Timeframe	Cold, Wet		Warm, Dry	
	Monthly	Cumulative	Monthly	Cumulative
Jan-Sep	--	9,450	--	9,450
October	1,900	11,350	3,500	12,950
November	1,200	12,550	2,400	15,350
December	500	13,050	800	16,150

- Currently adopted regulations allow sturgeon retention in the gorge area continuously through December 31.

FISHERY PROPOSALS

Recommendation

- The Joint Staff recommends that the currently adopted sport sturgeon fishing regulations for the estuary area be modified by prohibiting the retention of white sturgeon from the mouth at Buoy 10 upstream to the Wauna power lines (River Mile 40), including Youngs Bay, during October 1 through December 31.

- ✓ The proposed regulation change is consistent with the Joint State Sturgeon Fishery Management Agreement, sport fishery objectives adopted by the OFWC and the WFWC, and the Joint State fishery plan.
- ✓ Catch to date has exceeded the preseason expectation of 18,000 white sturgeon.

Recommendation

- Modify currently adopted sport sturgeon fishing regulations in the gorge area of the lower Columbia River. The Joint Staff is proposing two management options as follows:

- ✓ Option 1: Prohibit retention of white sturgeon in the Columbia River from the Wauna power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam, including the Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls, during November 1 through December 31.

Annual Catch Estimate = 11,350-12,950

- ✓ Option 2: Prohibit retention of white sturgeon in the Columbia River from the Wauna power lines upstream to Bonneville Dam, including the Willamette River downstream of Willamette Falls, during October 1-31.

Annual Catch Estimate = 11,150-12,650

- ✓ Both options are consistent with the Joint State Sturgeon Management Agreement, sport fishery objectives adopted by the OFWC and the WFWC, and the Joint State fishery plan.
- ✓ Both options ensure that total catches below Bonneville Dam remain within the annual 32,000 white sturgeon catch guideline.
- ✓ Both options provide season total catch projections that are similar to the preseason expectation of 12,000.
- ✓ The Joint Staff expects no need for further inseason emergency action under either option.
- ✓ Option 1 eliminates retention during November and December when the fishery is focused on the boat fishery in Sections 2-9.
- ✓ Option 2 eliminates retention during October when the fishery is focused on the bank fishery just below Bonneville Dam.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
September 23, 2003